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USM VC PROPOSES DEVELOPING ISLAMIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES – STRENGTHENING TIES WITH INDONESIAN UNIVERSITIES

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JEMBER, INDONESIA, September 2015 – The Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Professor Dato' Dr. Omar Osman has proposed for the swift development of Islamic research methodologies to replace the commonly-used methodologies which do not take into account religious priorities, more so in the context of the Muslim communities.

The Vice-Chancellor, in his keynote address entitled 'Kenapa Metodologi Penelitian Islam' (Why Islamic Observation Methodologies) at the Second International Islamic Development Conference (Konferens Internasional Pembangunan Islami Kedua/KIPI-2) organised by Universitas Jember Indonesia and Islamic Development Management Research Centre (ISDEV) USM, said, from current observations, researchers would usually use conventional observation methodologies, especially for those done by the non-Muslims, which is quite understandable, but if practiced by those having a background in Islamic studies and using similar methods, it would seem a bit peculiar.

"This brings up two questions which are, firstly, can observations on Islam and of Muslims be done using conventional methods of observation?; and secondly, isn't there any specially-developed Islamic observation methodology in existence, although there were already numerous Islamic scholars in the past whom had done observations and produced written materials?" Omar asked rhetorically to the approximately 100 participants who attended.

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A total of 31 working papers were presented during the three-day conference held at the Universitas Jember campus.

He believed that, the time has arrived for the Islamic scholars to look at these two questions closely and to develop a distinctive Islamic observation methodology to closely examine Islam and the Muslims, furthermore with the three major events which already had direct effects on the Muslims globally, beginning with the Iranian Revolution in 1979; the bombing of the New York World Trade Centre in 2001 and finally, the Arab Spring incident beginning 2010.


"These three events, whether directly or indirectly, have attracted observers from every field of study, be they from the Islamic fields of study or the non-Islamic fields, with the scholars in the Islamic fields shifting their focus from the fundamental Islamic fields such as Usuluddin, Fiqh and Tasawwuf to observations which are more empirical in nature.

"They used the slogan 'grounded Islamic studies' to connect the various Islamic fields of study to the realities in Islam and the contemporary Muslims and some even used the term "contemporary" in naming the faculty for Islamic studies and the Academy of Contemporary

He added, observers from non-Islamic fields of study, whether they come from the fields of the sciences or the arts, would be doing observations on Islam and the Muslims from their own specialised perspectives, leading to the introduction of Islam-based development, Islam-based economy, Islam-based politics, Islam-based psychology, Islam-based sociology, Islam-based sciences, and Islam-based laws among others.

"The question now is, in doing such observations on Islam and the Muslims, what type of observation methodologies were used by these observers?" said Omar further.

For him, there were irregularities in the observations done on Islam and the Muslims from utilising conventional means of observation which were non-Islamic in nature – 'worldview' or in the Arabic language 'tasawwur' and in having a different epistemology. The conventional methods of observation would look at 'tangible' items which are physical and material in nature, and consisting of the ability of the 'aql' and the scientific evidences of 'aqli', whereas the Islamic methods of observation would be concerned with both 'tangible' and 'intangible' matters which are physical, material and spiritual in nature, involving the capacity of the 'aql' and examples of 'aqli' together with the divine revelations (wahyu) and examples of 'naqli' – both scientific and metaphysics in nature.

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"It would be improper to do observations on Islam and the Muslims, with their differing worldviews and epistemology, by means of an observational methodology that totally differs in worldviews and epistemology; if such means are utilised as currently practised by many observers, surely the outcomes would be inaccurate, in addition to the conclusions made from the observations and the improperly-utilised methodologies," said the USM Vice-Chancellor further.

He hoped that the effort towards 'Mencari Metodologi Penelitian Islami' (Searching for the Islamic Methodology of Observations) as the theme of the Second International Islamic Development Conference (KIPI-2) this year would be able to develop an Islamic methodology of observations, to ensure that the use of conventional methods of observations which may negatively affect the belief system of the Muslims could be swiftly checked.

The Vice-Chancellor of USM was at Jember, Indonesia for the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Universitas Jember to enhance academic and research cooperation, with the intent of expanding it via the offering of joint-study programmes in a few academic disciplines such as Islamic Science Development, Engineering and the Environment from relations established since 2012.

Also on the same day, Omar had a meeting with the top management of Universitas Jember including its Deputy Vice-Chancellors, focusing on various issues such as autonomy of the university, competition, the economy, knowledge and globalisation and the explosion of technology and its effects on the university in the future.

Later in the evening, the Vice-Chancellor had a meeting with the management of Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember, which was attended by its Rector, Dr. Eminullah Elhady. The university was established in 1981 under the Muhammadiyah corporate ownership, which has 42 universities throughout Indonesia.

"We hope to strengthen the collaboration with this university, which includes the offering of academic programmes and also postgraduate studies in the future," said Omar.

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